

The Aesthetic Cocoon

'Fashion, like architecture, inheres in the darkness of the lived moment, belongs to the dream consciousness of the collective. The latter awakes, for example, in advertising.'¹ Walter Benjamin

The Blasé Individual

In 1903 the German sociologist, Georg Simmel, published one of the seminal accounts of the subjectivity of the modern metropolitan individual in his essay, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'. Here Simmel developed the notion of the blasé individual, whose nerve endings, bombarded by the continual stimulation of modern metropolitan existence, had become so frayed that they had learnt to renounce all forms of response. 'The psychological foundation,' writes Simmel, 'upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected, is the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli. . . . Thus the metropolitan type — which naturally takes on a thousand individual modifications — creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it. Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a rational manner, thus creating a mental predominance through the intensification of consciousness, which in turn is caused by it.'²

To become blasé was both a product of and a defence against the hectic pace of the modern city, its intoxicating impulses and kaleidoscopic sensations. Moreover, this intellectualised mode of existence could be compared to the objective, matter-of-factness of the money economy. For, according to Simmel, 'the money economy and the domination of the intellect stand in the closest relationship to one another'.³ As a result the modern metropolitan type — the blasé individual — began to adopt a disinterested way of navigating the city, the city of capital, its intellectualised movements echoing the alienated movements of capital itself: 'This psychological intellectualistic attitude and the money economy are in such close integration that no

¹Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Camb., MA: Harvard, 1999, p. 393.

²Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 70.

³Simmel, p. 71.

one is able to say whether it was the former that effected the latter or *vice versa*.⁴ What Simmel offers, then, is a model in which the predominant aesthetic reflex of the modern metropolitan type is related to the structure of the economic system.

One century later it is worth reconsidering Simmel's thesis. How might we rework Simmel's model of the blasé individual to fit in with contemporary life? How might we rework his connection between a predominant aesthetic sensibility and the money economy? As the mechanised rationality of modernity gives way to the ephemeral dreamworld of postmodernity, and as capitalism itself has mutated into invisible, gaseous forms, such as credit, how might we characterise the predominant sensibility of the *postmodern* metropolitan type?

Wallpaper* Person

I want to propose that there is a new predominant sensibility at large, an individual that I want to call '*wallpaper** person'⁵ *Wallpaper** person is the creature that colonises the capsular civilisations (as Leiven de Cauter has described them) of today. Born to an age that is thoroughly narcissistic in Christopher Lasch's terms, thoroughly aestheticised, and hence, in my own terms, anaesthetised, an age that is, in Andreas Huyssen's terms, gripped by a form of amnesia, this creature might best be described as the pleasure seeking amnesiac of today, in constant search of gratification of the most ephemeral kind, and blinkered by its own aestheticised outlook to the social inequalities of the world outside.⁶

*Wallpaper** person constitutes a still evolving, yet increasingly significant sensibility. For *Wallpaper** culture presents if not the dominant paradigm in Europe today, then one to which not just Blairite Britain — 'Cool Britannia' — , but also much of the rest of Western culture — and especially, I might add, Western architectural culture — aspires. What marks out *Wallpaper** as a topic of interest from our perspective is not so much the fact that within its logic architecture is reduced to an aspect of lifestyling, alongside fashion, dining out, exotic holidays and the like, but rather its very orientation

⁴Simmel, p. 71.

⁵Throughout this paper I shall be pursuing Baudrillard's tactic of 'the fatal strategy'. My argument will be deliberately exaggerated, so as to become less a representation of reality, than a transcendence of it, while aiming to reveal , nonetheless, certain truths about the world.

⁶On this see: Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, London: Routledge, 1996; Christopher Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism*, New York: Warner Books, 1979; Neil Leach, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*, Camb., MA.: MIT Press, 1999.

towards the fictive and the imaginary. 'Who will you be in the next twenty four hours?' asks one advertisement in a recent edition.

*Wallpaper** culture could be described as a form of escapist dreamworld that has evolved under conditions of extreme opulence afforded by advanced capitalism. The journal itself has proved extraordinarily successful. Full of virtually captionless advertisements of dreamy models striking often vacant poses, the journal revels in its superficiality — albeit with a subtle sense of irony; full too of articles of escapist dreaming, the journal offers a snapshot of the carefully manicured, indulgent life of the jet-setting, highly paid executive of today, a dream-life to which many people aspire.

The Neo-Surrealist

Yet although *Wallpaper** person is a turn of the millennium creature, born of the extreme affluence of advanced capitalism, its characteristics can be traced back to an earlier model — a contemporary of Simmel's 'blasé individual' from the early part of the twentieth century. I refer here to the surrealists. But the surrealists should be distinguished from the blasé individual. Whereas the blasé individual adopted an essentially negative stance towards the modernist metropolis as a form of defence, the surrealists took a more positive approach towards it. They surrendered themselves to its enticements, its intoxicating impulses and kaleidoscopic sensations. The surrealists' approach was a self-consciously aestheticising approach, and they exploited the narcotic-like potential of the visual image as a source of intoxication. Aestheticisation, moreover, led to a form of mythologisation. The city became an enchanted dreamscape for Louis Aragon as he set about devising his 'mythology of the modern'.

The distortion to which the surrealist gaze surrenders has much in common with the predominant aestheticising outlook of today, and offers us an important clue as to why we tend to mythologise the present. Just as for Aragon within the 'mythology of the modern' petrol pumps could metamorphise into Egyptian goddesses, so too, within the 'mythology of the postmodern', 'Diesel' can emerge as a brand name for jeans and designer clothing.⁷ The point, then, is that *Wallpaper** person has adapted

⁷'Painted brightly with English or invented names, possessing just one long, supple arm, a luminous faceless head, a single foot and a numbered wheel in the belly, the petrol pumps sometimes take on the appearance of the divinities of Egypt or of those cannibal tribes which worship war and war alone. O Texaco motor oil, Esso, Shell, great inscriptions of human potentiality, soon shall we cross ourselves before your fountains, and the youngest among us will perish from having contemplated their nymphs in naphtha.' [Aragon, *Paris Peasant* trans. Simon Watson Taylor, London: Pan Books, 1987, p. 132.]

psychologically to city culture. Unlike Simmel's blasé individual who 'resists' the city, *Wallpaper** person has developed a mechanism for 'enjoying' the city. and like the surrealists, *Wallpaper** person resorts to the realms of dream and fantasy. The contemporary, neo-surrealist world of *Wallpaper** culture is — I wish to argue — an enchanted dreamscape, an aestheticised and mythologised dreamscape.

Narcissus

The other model I wish to draw upon to sketch out this individual — *Wallpaper** person — with its characteristic behaviour and corresponding patterns of spatial practice is Narcissus, the quintessential model for aesthetic contemplation.⁸

Christopher Lasch has described our contemporary culture as a 'culture of narcissism'.⁹ Life is dominated nowadays by a form of introversion and self-absorption, prompting an erosion of any awareness of others, and a culture of untrammelled individualism. The mobile phone is a symptom of this narcissistic condition, as users spin themselves bubbles, oblivious to all that is around them. On the train, in the street and in the countryside, strange one-way conversations take place with an invisible, silent 'other'. Meanwhile dating takes place less and less within traditional places of social interaction — the pub, cornershop or club — and increasingly through abstracted telephone dating systems and zones of cyber communication. Computer screens further exacerbate this condition. Locked into their interior worlds, computer users grow increasingly divorced from their immediate surroundings. They communicate not with their neighbours but with fellow computer users, floating within some nebulous realm of cyberspace. All this helps to promote a culture that is becoming increasingly individualised and solipsistic, and divorced from its immediate surroundings. In our present disembodied world of telephone dating and mobile phones, this introverted and self-absorbed domain, individuals are increasingly isolated, cocooned from everything around, like commuters crammed into rush hour underground trains, studiously ignoring those right in front of their noses.

⁸Narcissus is the beautiful youth of classical antiquity, with whom the nymph Echo had fallen in love. Echo is scorned by Narcissus, and she retreats into the woods, fading away to nothing as she nurses her broken heart. Nemesis punishes Narcissus for spurning the advances of Echo and other admirers. As Narcissus leans out over a pool for a drink following a hard day's hunting, he is captivated by his own image, mistaking the reflection for reality itself. He tries in vain to reach out and grasp the image, which also appears to reach out for him, but eventually, lying there without food or sleep, he wastes away in his own self love and dies. When they come to bury him, they discover that his body is nowhere to be seen, but that a flower with white petals and a yellow centre has blossomed. To this day this flower still bears his name, Narcissus.

⁹Christopher Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism*.

What we find here is that the contemporary narcissist is cocooned not only in a material way — by the hi-tech comfort zones of contemporary existence — but also in a psychological way. This serves as a adaptation of that 'protective organ' of Simmel's blasé individual. But this cocoon serves not only as a mechanism of defence, but also as a source of gratification. The term that I want to use to describe this psychological bubble in which the contemporary narcissist exists is 'the aesthetic cocoon', which might be described as a three-dimensional version of the reflective pool in the original myth of Narcissus.¹⁰

What this amounts to is the ability to recognise oneself in the objects around one, in the reflection of one's own aesthetic aspirations. This recognition constitutes a form of confirmation of those aspirations which in turn leads to a sense of gratification, that may be understood within the framework of Freud's notion of the Death Instinct, as a form of transcendence of death and return to the unalienated existence of the nirvana of the womb. What this tends to generate is a cocoon-like existence, predicated on aesthetic gratification.¹¹ The nirvana of the aesthetic cocoon replicates the memory of the nirvana of the womb.¹² And it is this cocoon, this isolated state of being cosseted from reality and locked into some dreamworld, that can be expanded and developed to offer a model for much contemporary life.

Yet what is at risk in this process of aestheticisation is that everything becomes aestheticised and thereby anaesthetised. In *The Anaesthetics of Architecture* I have attempted to describe this mechanism: 'The raising of one's consciousness of sensory matters — smell, taste, touch, sound and appearance — allows a corresponding drowsiness to descend like a blanket over all else. The process generates its own womb-like sensory cocoon around the individual, a semi-permeable membrane which offers a state of constant gratification while filtering out all that is undesirable. To aestheticize is therefore to sink blissfully into an intoxicating stupor, which serves to

¹⁰In that myth Narcissus gazes at his own reflection as though into a mirror, and through it seems to receive some form of aesthetic gratification. Yet the mirror is only a two-dimensional source of reflection. What I would like to suggest is that in terms of *wallpaper** person the 'reflective surface' needs to be perceived as an entire environment, a three-dimensional container, a cocoon.

¹¹For further references to the 'aesthetic cocoon', see Leach, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*, *passim*.

¹²The point here is that, as Herbert Marcuse has argued, the narcissist enjoys a certain existential oneness with the world. As such, we might recognise in this narcissistic individual someone content within a certain limited framework, oblivious to external concerns and fed by personal forms of gratification. The narcissist, then, attains a certain level of satisfaction. He or she fails to engage with the world as it actually is, but that does not prevent that person from achieving a certain balance and equilibrium. For the image of Narcissus is above all an image of harmony. [Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p.??]

cushion the individual from the world outside like some alcoholic haze. . . .¹³ Moreover, the real problem of aestheticization is that it suppresses the political and the social.¹⁴

The logic of aestheticisation constitutes a distorted, rose-tinted way of looking at the world that inverts that world, robbing it of its deeper political and social concerns, and even converting the sublime — in the sense of the horrific, excessive, the ugly and the brutal — into the beautiful.¹⁵ And in this process of appropriating even the ugly, the brutal and the industrial, and converting it into the ‘trendy’ there is a disturbing inversion. We enter a topsy-turvy, ‘Alice in Wonderland’ realm of myth and fantasy, in which nothing is quite what it seems.

What needs to be brought into the frame, then, is the sense of fantasy that underpins many forms of contemporary life. For the narcissist depends not only on the actual admiring glances of others, but also on a certain measure of delusion and escapist fantasy. The original myth of Narcissus can therefore open up a further dimension to this contemporary narcissist — the dimension of escapist dreaming. The point here is that Nemesis punishes Narcissus for scorning the advances of Echo and others by making him fall in love with his own image. She makes him deluded. It is this sense of delusion that needs to be reinscribed within our understanding of the contemporary narcissist. The narcissist fails to recognise the reflection of the self as the self, and reads it as an alternative ‘other’ in whom he/she has fallen in love. Recognition is often a form of misrecognition.

But equally this mechanism may work the other way. The contemporary narcissist may ‘read’ him or herself into a particular situation and ‘identify’ with a character in that situation. This is the projective side of narcissism that encourages a culture of fantasy identification. Indeed contemporary conditions foster a culture of role-playing and lifestyle adoption in which media personalities act as role models to be emulated and

¹³Leach, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*, p. 44.

¹⁴‘The aestheticization of the world induces a form of numbness. It reduces any notion of pain to the level of the seductive image. What is at risk in this process of aestheticization is that political and social content may be subsumed, absorbed and denied. The seduction of the image works against any underlying sense of social commitment. . . . The world becomes aestheticized and anaesthetized.’ [Leach, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*, p. 45.]

¹⁵Witness many of the recent trends from Damien Hirst’s sharks in formaldehyde that fill our art galleries to the mock military combat gear that is for sale to kids in even ‘respectable’ stores such as Marks and Spencers. In a society where sliced cows, bisected sheep and rotting animal heads can be proffered as art; in a society where films such as Cronenberg’s ‘Crash’ and other disaster movies receive top billing at our cinemas; in a society where former power stations are turned into art galleries, abattoirs into parks, and industrial warehouses into bijou apartments; and in a society where ‘Dr Martens’ industrial footwear and ‘Diesel’ clothing can become the height of fashion, there appears to be a fascination with the industrial and the brutal, that underpins all aspects of cultural life. ‘Dead hard’ is dead cool.

admired. As Laura Mulvey has observed, the formation of the ego ideal at the mirror stage sets the scene for identification with the ideal egos of the media industry in later life.¹⁶ Mulvey calls this process 'narcissistic identification'. In an age of hyper-alienation this urge is exacerbated. It has the effect of turning people into animated mannequins, acting out their lives according to the well-rehearsed steps of some Hollywood role model. And just as role models are reduced to fictive characters, so too architecture is reduced to 'stage sets' — the ephemeral settings in which one might lead out one's fantasy existence.¹⁷ The contemporary world of this modern day Narcissus, this neo-surrealist, constitutes a form of dreamworld.

Dreamworlds

The signs are already there. We need only look to the titles emerging at the turn of the millennium from Slavoj Žižek, *A Plague of Fantasies*, to Marc Augé, *A War of Dreams*, to realise that some of the key cultural commentators have detected a new phase in human consciousness, in which dream and fantasy are emerging as dominant themes.¹⁸ Whether we consider how the virtualisation of reality has exposed the imposture of reality itself, as Žižek suggests, or how the increasing preponderance of simulation in our media culture has led to an effacement of the distinction between real and actual, so that life itself takes on the semblance of a soap opera, as Augé suggests, it is clear that the hegemony of the real is under question. Virtuality, simulation and fantasy are playing an increasing part in the way we live our lives today. Increasingly contemporary life has become a fantasy domain of role-playing and lifestyle adoption.

But what I want to explore here is how capitalism itself has helped to promote this sense of fantasy. For just as the very movement of capital in the modern metropolis

¹⁶Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in Anthony Easthope (ed.), *Contemporary Film Theory*, London: Longman, 1993, pp. 111-124.

¹⁷To some extent the very dumbness of much *wallpaper** style advertising, the very hollowness of the images, invites viewers to fill that space with their own meaning, to appropriate that space, and see themselves within it. The argument can be derived from Roland Barthes analysis of the Eiffel Tower. It is the very 'emptiness' and uselessness of the tower that allow it to be adopted as a universal symbol of Paris. [See Roland Barthes, 'The Eiffel Tower' in Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture*, London: Routledge, 1997.] The same principle applies on a broader scale to media personalities. Thus we find a preponderance of cultural icons today who are essentially hollow, emptied out of any real personality — as in the case of the Spice Girls who have been recoded with virtual identities in the manner of Lara Croft — and ready to be filled with meaning. The narcissist colonises and 'inhabits' that cultural icon, as though it were a mannequin, reading it as the self.

¹⁸Slavoj Žižek, *A Plague of Fantasies*, London: Verso; Marc Augé, *A War of Dreams*, trans. Liz Heron, London: Pluto, 1999.

conditioned, for Simmel, the response of the blasé individual, so too the very sense of fantasy propagated by late capitalism has fuelled — I wish to argue — a new sensibility.

Here it is important here to recognise the increasingly dominant role of myth in contemporary society. ‘After the twilight of the Gods,’ wrote Siegfried Kracauer, ‘the Gods did not abdicate.’¹⁹ Indeed advanced capitalism itself can be understood as a form of mythologised dreamworld, wherein the increasing rationalisation of our technological world only spawns its opposite, in terms of the dialectic of the enlightenment: myth. The very abstraction and refinement of our technological world, where technology seeks to hide itself in ever more sophistication, burying itself deep within our subconscious with its streamlined, minimalist, low profiles, such that we have lost any sense of its hegemony, presupposes, in dialectical fashion, an invitation to even greater mythologisation. Like the conjurer’s trick, where the magician conceals the true devices at work, so as to fool the audience into attributing them to magic, so technology, in effacing itself, invites us to believe in its magical potential. Just as rationality spawns myth, so hyperrationality spawns hypermyth. The more rational our society becomes — the more sophisticated its technology — the more it will encourage the mythic.

Credit Culture

This sense of the mythic and the fantastic has been reinforced by capitalist production. ‘Capitalism,’ wrote Walter Benjamin, ‘was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and, through it, a reactivation of mythic forces.’²⁰ The model of the goods on a supermarket shelf, whose methods of procurement and distribution remain largely hidden such that the goods appear to have been ‘conjured up’ as if by magic, is one that can be extended to all facets of contemporary life. The supermarket represents the extreme state of our hyperreal dreamworld, an utter fantasy land of abundance, where capitalism has so succeeded in concealing itself that even the price tags — painful reminders of the cost to be paid for goods — have been removed and replaced by barcodes. Nor need any physical money change hands, as everything can be accounted for seamlessly by computerised, invisible fluxes of credit. Contemporary life holds out the promise of a consumerist heaven, a promise that is reinforced by these ‘magical’ methods of procurement.

¹⁹Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Levin, Camb., MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 80.

²⁰Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 391.

The supermarket has turned into an enchanted dreamscape — a cathedral of consumption — while the goods themselves have become ‘objects of devotion’ to be worshipped and adored by customers — ‘heavenly’ cream cakes, ‘divine’ chocolate. The credit card, furthermore, the dominant form of payment, enhances this condition. Not only may payment be deferred indefinitely, but the goods purchased appear as objects of wish fulfillment. And this is an important point. For the plastic card operates within the realm of the future conditional — ‘you too could have this product’ — and what is the future conditional other than the potential realm of wish fulfillment?

Here we might reflect upon Walter Benjamin’s understanding of the wish-image within the dreamworld of modernity. The artefacts of the contemporary metropolis were, for Benjamin, the very embodiment of a collective dreaming. As Graeme Gilloch comments, ‘Just as the desires and wishes of the individual are frustrated and repressed in waking life only to reappear in disguised form in dreams during sleep, so the cityscape and the artefacts found therein are dream-like creations of the dormant collectivity.’²¹ That dreaming, moreover, is based on utopian wish-images: ‘For Benjamin, the edifices and the objects of the metropolis are utopian wish-images, frozen representations or objectifications of genuine wants and aspirations that remain unfulfilled or thwarted.’²²

Within a postmodern context the far sightedness of Benjamin's comments begins to emerge. Contemporary lifestyle magazines, such as *Hello!* or *OK!* are precisely catalogues of these wish-images. They contain models of success to which the rest of the population might aspire. For features on the rich and famous, and the environment in which they live, function less as detective narratives, revealingly the previously hidden, and more as wish-images for which less fortunate mortals need only dream. And yet through that dream — that sense of fantasy and creative identification with the characters portrayed — readers are ‘invited’ to imagine themselves in such a situation, to ‘dream themselves’ into the pages of the magazine.

The utopian wish-image need not be conditioned by the metropolis itself, so much as by the commodities for sale there. It is these commodities that form the wish-images of the ‘dream-filled sleep’ which has now spread beyond the confines of Europe to all those first world countries saturated by the extreme opulence of advanced capitalism. Here we must understand the dream, in Freudian terms, as the domain in which wishes from our periods of wakefulness are fulfilled. In the context of fantasising over

²¹Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis*, Camb.: Polity, 1996, p. 104.

²²Gilloch, p. 105.

commodities this dreaming might more properly be called 'daydreaming'. And yet, according to Freud, the two are fundamentally related, the daydream serving as 'the nucleus and prototype for night-dreams.'²³ At the same time there is a crucial distinction between daydreams and night dreams. They operate within a different temporal framework. Freud refers to night-dreams in terms of the day's 'residues'. Daydreams also contain traces of previous desires, but they are oriented towards the future. As Rachel Bowlby puts it, 'For although Freud says in the *Interpretation* that daydreams, like dreams, are derived from and resuscitate childhood wishes, nonetheless when he comes to talk about them in essays of the subsequent years, the two wishful modes that he names as being those that are typically expressed in daydreams are both of them turned towards the future, rather than returning to an image of ancient satisfactions.'²⁴ Daydreams are therefore dreams in the present which may contain elements of the past, but which 'fantasise' about the future. The other crucial difference between daydreams and night-dreams is that daydreams are 'transparent'. They are quite intentional and unambiguous stories of wish-fulfillment. As Bowlby comments, 'Unlike the dreams of sleep, daydreams in this instance are said to show their meaning on the surface: there is no subterranean layer to be plumbed. As such, they can provide the varnish on a dream, appearing as a gloss for the unrepresentable materials underneath. In themselves, they are what they seem: straightforward — unified and unidirectional — stories of wish-fulfillment.'²⁵

But the point here is that the credit card fosters this realm of day-dreaming by making that dream potentially realisable. The credit card, then, will fulfill the promise of the unfulfilled. And in helping to realise those dreams, it will function as a catalyst for collective dreaming. Advanced capitalism, then, — credit culture — in its very nature is grounded in the structure of dreaming and myth, and this is only fuelled by the culture of the credit card.

Advertising Culture

Advertising reinforces this sense of desire, this materialist sense of dreaming. Rather than constitute an awakening, as Benjamin might have supposed, advertisements seem to lay the foundations for dreams. More than anything else, they are collections of wish images, catalogues of material goods that are proffered up for potential ownership. But

²³Sigmund Freud quoted in Rachel Bowlby, 'The Other Day: The Interpretation of Daydreams', *New Formations*, 34, Summer 1998, p. 13.

²⁴Bowlby, p. 17.

²⁵Bowlby, p. 16.

advertisements are no innocent catalogues. The fetishisation of the commodity, which Karl Marx had observed, has reached new heights in contemporary advertising culture. Goods have been fetishised and tinged with a halo of sexual allure. The commodity has been sexualised, as Benjamin observed, no less than sex has been commodified.²⁶ And yet the scope of advertising — its sophistication and its powers of seduction — has transcended whatever Benjamin might have imagined. Nor should we dismiss advertising as an incidental and irrelevant aspect of contemporary life. For advertising, as Andrew Wernick has observed in his book, *Promotional Culture*, has so colonised our symbolic horizons that it is all but co-extensive with the way in which we see the world these days.²⁷

Moreover, advertising constitutes an ecstatic form of escapism that masks the world of the actual, and conjures up instead a fantasy dreamworld. What advertising agents seek to appeal to above all is this sense of fantasy which dominates contemporary life. Advertisements are, in effect, repositories of dreams. They are intended to conjure up in a Proustian manner a whole dream world of lifestyling and commodity consumption, viewers are invited to imagine themselves into the scenario depicted, transported there as though on some magic carpet.

A recent advertisement for the Peugeot 206 shows a young man in a cinema watching a movie of a young girl driving the car. The girl winks at him. The young man closes his eyes, and suddenly finds himself in the car alongside her. Significantly the car is being driven through desert landscape. This particular advertisement therefore partakes in two forms of fantasy — the fantasy of some romantic engagement, and the fantasy of driving through an exotic landscape — while also revealing the eroticism that lies behind commodity fetishism. The point about this advertisement is that not only does it reveal techniques of romanticisation that underpin advertising culture, but it also presupposes a capacity for dreaming in everyday life that extends beyond the space of the advertisement. Indeed one can only assume that, were the young man to buy such a car, he would drive it around, living out some fantasy of crossing the desert, accompanied by the young lady in the advertisement. A further advertisement exposes the potential of the television to act as some Alice in Wonderland-like looking glass, that would transport you somewhere else as though on some magic carpet. ‘You don’t have to take the train to escape to the Peak District’ reads one advertisement near St Pancras railway station for ‘Peak Practice’, a television series.

²⁶ Supermarkets, as Daniel Miller reminds us, are places where we make love. Daniel Miller, *A Theory of Shopping*, Camb.: Polity, 1998.

²⁷ Andrew Wernick, *Promotional Culture*, London: Sage, 1991.

The television, then, the computer screen and the cinema screen serve as a form of interface between our 'real' world and the imaginary world beyond. And yet this interface is somewhat Janus-faced. It serves as a two-way valve. Just as we are encouraged to transport ourselves into the space of the imaginary, so too we bring with us associations of that imaginary dreamworld into our actual lives. Everyday life is colonised by the mythic. It is dominated by fantasy and dreaming.

Habitat

The creature, then, that emerges at the beginning of this new century is one whose capacity for dreaming and escapism has become fully developed, an amnesiac creature, insular, narcissistic, myopic, continually aestheticising and romanticising the present, for ever escaping the actual into a dreamworld of the 'as-if'. It is, moreover, a creature that has developed a new aesthetic response to new conditions. Just as for Simmel, the anonymous circulation of capital at the beginning of the twentieth century was reflected in the disinterested patterns of movement of the blasé individual, so too the dreamlike quality of the credit world of advanced capitalism has helped to engender a new sensibility. The blasé individual has mutated into the neo-surrealist, narcissistic dreamer: *wallpaper** person. Above all, *wallpaper** person exists within his or her own aesthetic cocoon, a distorted rose-tinted cocoon, removed, cosseted, protected from harsh reality, as much by choice of habitat, as by the dominant escapist mentality. But where does this creature hang out? What architectural environments constitute its habitat?

To some extent the habitat of the *wallpaper** person is merely an extension of that very individual, or perhaps rather an inverted mould, as it were, perfectly formed to accommodate his or her every need. The habitat becomes an articulation of that 'aesthetic cocoon' — a heavily serviced, hi-tech space of comfort and sensory gratification. And this very sense of cocooning brings with it a corresponding indifference to the world outside. The narcissist knows only his or her pleasures. All else is ignored. Paradise today is a paradise of creature comforts where everything noisome or irksome — mosquitoes, disease, filth etc. — must be edited out with Disneylike efficiency. But it is not merely the tedious tasks that must be edited out in our age of convenient, pre-packed, micro-waveable meals, and non-iron shirts, but so too those individuals who do not belong to this 'Club Mediterranean' existence. For *Wallpaper** culture is an exclusive culture, accessible only to the 'haves' and not to the 'have nots'. What emerges is a fortress culture of inclusion and exclusion based largely on economic grounds. It is easy to see, then, how the model of the cocoon extended to the heavily

serviced hi-tech apartment might be further developed to offer an insular ‘fortress-LA’ model for society as a whole. For the whole principle of this aestheticising thrust is to rinse the world of social and political concerns, while the narcissistic dimension to this *wallpaper** existence denies any true engagement with ‘the other’. And with this overall shift we may recognise too the potential demise of the public realm itself.

What emerge, then, are ‘bubbles of immanence’ as Marc Augé has described them, supposedly fictionalised worlds for which Disneyland is the archetype. To quote Augé: ‘Theme parks, holiday clubs, leisure parks and residential ones like Center Parcs, but also the private towns which are seeing the light of day in America, and even the fortified and security-patrolled residences which are springing up in the cities of the Third World, like so many fortresses, form what one might call bubbles of immanence’.²⁸ These ‘bubbles of immanence’ extend to international chains of stores, hotels and restaurants, which adopt the same decor anywhere in the world. They are instantly recognisable private, fictionalised cosmologies within a broader world, ‘parentheses to be opened and closed at discretion, with the use of finance and the knowledge of a few basic codes.’²⁹

Wallpaper* Compound

Intriguingly, this is precisely the form of ‘dream habitat’ suggested by *Wallpaper** magazine with its tongue-in-cheek, but nonetheless revealing description of a proposed ‘capsular enclave’ — ‘compound’ — for *wallpaper** people.

‘Location, location, location. Exhaustive sun studies will see the first *wallpaper** compounds go up in Bondi, Tunis, Beirut, Lisbon, Beverly Hills, Palm Springs and Santa Barbara.

There will be plenty of space for pooling around on the rooftop lido deck. Liveried cabana boys in terry-cloth jumpsuits will see to your every need while you do your lengths in the glass-bottomed pool.

Abstract balcony screens keep the paparazzi guessing while you rinse off in your outdoor shower.

²⁸Augé, pp. 112 - 113.

²⁹Augé, p. 113.

Secure parking spaces for bicycles and scooters. To make more room for subterranean services (kitchens, dry-cleaning facilities), the architects have done away with underground parking. Residents have the use of five stretch Saabs, complete with drivers.

No time to cook? E-mail your concierge from the air and a Balinese buffet will be waiting for you when you walk through the door.

Every hour is happy hour in the lobby lounge. A round-the-clock bar and serious snack service turns the courtyard into a hub for hanging. Remember, you helped to vet your fellow residents, so you actually like the people you live with.

A team of concierges look after your life, whether you're cross-town, or across the planet.

Security is not an issue, as those cabana boys also do night duty. . .

Located in Sudan, Beirut, Seville or any other sun-trap you care to mention, this block is soundproof and safe. Stretching to four floors, it consists of 24 apartments of 100 square metres each. An egalitarian enclave, there are no plush penthouses. Thick, concrete slabs between each unit block out noisy neighbours; none of the residents share party walls; and when it comes to security, this block is harder to crack than Quantico. Discreet alarms and video cameras cover all the hidden corners, while clued up concierges check the mail and quiz couriers. . .

You're not at home very often, but when you are, you want a wipe-clean and sweep-easy life. You live in a service sector, after all, and who is to say it should stop at the front door? Concierges are on hand 24 hours a day to take care of the laundry and the domestic chores, and they'll fix you up a lunch-box to take in to work. Filled with your favourite snacks (aubergine spring rolls, club sandwich, pumpkin pie), this tailor-made tiffin will see you through the day'³⁰

*Wallpaper** completes the article with an appeal to any would-be developers interested in such a proposal: 'Developers interested in erecting the *Wallpaper** compound should e-mail wallpaper_magazine@time.inc-com.'

³⁰*Wallpaper**, Special Edition, 1998, p. 150.

The picture is complete. The fictionalised ‘dream’ compound presented by *Wallpaper** for the would-be ‘dream’ occupant of this ethereal world is offered up to would-be ‘dream’ developers of such a world. The point is that these ‘compounds’ need not be built. They are merely conjured up as idealised dreamworlds. As such, they belong to an emerging tradition of architectural dreamworlds. Beginning with *Paris Match*, and extending into a second generation of celebrity lifestyle magazines such as *Hello*, the houses of the famous have been illustrated as dream interiors to which the rest of society might aspire. Now *Wallpaper** has developed the virtual interior, employing architects to design buildings that are never intended to be built — virtual, dream interiors. The ‘compound’ is the latest development of this trend.

Conclusion

Contemporary cultural commentators, such as Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard, describe our present condition in terms of images. Under ‘late capitalism’, according to Jameson, everything has been co-opted into commodities and images. Yet this vision presents a rather straitened understanding of contemporary life. There is no space in their accounts for the role of myth — for fantasy, magic or even dreaming. And yet advanced capitalism, I would maintain, has turned the world into a mythologised dreamworld, based on fantasy and escapism.

Baudrillard describes our contemporary hyperreal culture as a world of images which has lost touch with its referents in the ‘real’ world, such that the image constitutes our new ‘reality’. Perhaps we need to revise this notion. Instead of a hyperreal world of images we have a *Wallpaper** culture in which the image has mutated into the ‘wish-image’. *Wallpaper** culture, then, is a dreamworld not of images, but of wish images, fuelled by a culture of credit and advertising, a dreamworld that has itself become our new reality.

And if, as Benjamin claimed, the fantasies of an epoch remain sedimented in the buildings it spawned, maybe the fantasies of our ‘dream epoch’ remain sedimented in the ‘dream buildings’ it spawns.³¹

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³¹Gilloch, p. 123.